

Strategy 2. Assist in developing governmental processes leading to "e-democracy"

Strategy Two suggests that better government is government that invites and facilitates citizen participation, interaction and increased public access. The single most critical assumption is that e-democracy initiatives must assure customer choice and deliver "citizen-centered" government. It is perhaps the most innovative, yet the most natural path that America's Workforce Network can follow.

In adopting this strategy, AWN can experiment in the use of "push technology"-- e-mail responses, live broadcasts of departmental events, automated electronic mailing lists to provide requested information and updates, and tailored information for individuals as a means to open doors and invite citizens to learn what we are doing and to comment on it. The AWN can also use e-government as a means to "democratize" data. Importantly, the technology can directly confront the difficulties of access for the disabled and address the issues generally included under the heading of "digital divide." Encompassed as part of the AWN's mission is the idea of providing citizens with the information they need to make more informed decisions regarding their work life.

AWN investments in America's Career Kit, including America's Job Bank, America's Learning eXchange, and America's Career InfoNet, are strong starts in e-democracy. Other positive "starts" in e-democracy are found in the National Guard's investment in training and programming being made available to local citizens and programs sponsored by the US Department of Commerce. Again, ETA must consider making strategic investments to states and local areas as "seed capital" to support innovations and demonstrations across the country. Central questions focus on how to integrate national investments with state and local investments so that real and positive differences are felt by customers in the public workforce development system.

Perhaps most significant is the fact that the Internet could get people, who now feel alienated from government, more involved in it. It has the potential to strengthen our democracy and to make government more open, more efficient, and user-friendlier.

Imagine this scenario three years from now:

In preparation for the re-authorization of the Workforce Investment Act, the Secretary holds a series of Internet-based town meetings inviting citizens to listen and comment on WIA. The agenda and issues for the town hall meetings have been developed in advance through a collaborative effort between state, local and federal partners in AWN using web-based interactive tools. The entire town hall proceedings are recorded, transcribed using voice recognition software, and posted on the DOL home page stimulating further comment and input from the public. Interactive public dialogues, using threaded discussions, are initiated over the web between senior DOL officials, state and local officials, and congressional staff. Individual citizens can ask questions, request supporting data and information, or just watch the dialogue as it occurs. Citizens who desire to learn more on a specific issue log on to ETA's web page and access research files, grantee performance reports, legislative drafts, or other related information.